

2010 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

It is a tradition for part of this address to be a “last year in review” report. Last year’s address, by and large, was an exception to that rule. We were still in shock from the horrifying events of December 12, 2008, and I spoke to you from my heart about our shared values of friendship and community. As the year went on, we recovered together. We found a new appreciation of the blessings that have come our way, including the blessing of having each other. By that standard alone, I would describe 2009 as having been a good year.

Still, I suspect that if 20 years from now someone asks me what I remember about 2009, my response will be: 1. The plane landing safely in the Hudson River, and 2. The economy.

The first event has been described as a miracle, and perhaps it was. But as we learned more about what happened in the minutes leading to that event and the response that followed, it was also a remarkable display of skill, courage, and good behavior by dozens of people. Most of them – pilots, flight attendants, ferry crews, first responders – would say they were just doing their jobs. That was the same thing I heard repeatedly from many members of our city staff last year, be they police officers, street crews, or managers. They ended 2008 and began 2009 under circumstances almost as dramatic as the plane landing in the river, and without the unqualified happy ending. They performed professionally, capably and honorably then, and as the year went on. It frequently wasn’t easy. There is no “just” about doing a good job in difficult times like these.

The economy has impacted us as individuals, households, businesses, organizations, and government agencies. As a local government, we had our hands full in attempting to deal with it. So far, we have done so with considerable success. For the last fiscal year and this one, we have dealt with almost \$1 million in revenue shortfalls successfully. We have not filled every vacant position, but we have not laid anyone off for financial reasons. Our management and our rank and file employees have shared in the financial sacrifices that have kept good people on the payroll and doing their jobs.

The state of today’s economy has made most of us more receptive to the various bits of advice we have received from those who lived through the Great Depression. One that sticks in my mind is a quote from someone’s dad in a newspaper story: “Sometimes you just try to keep the car on the road.” Last year the wheels stayed on, and the car stayed on the road. (Literally, no small achievement in the first and last days of 2009!) But we did more than that: We actually drove a good way down the highway. We added two night-time patrol officers without creating additional costs. We maintained services such as library hours, youth programs and park maintenance while many Oregon cities are reducing or eliminating them. We found grants to maintain after-school programs

and partners to help us sustain them for the long haul. We revived our housing rehabilitation program and created a business loan program. Each of our departments found ways not only to sustain service levels, but to improve them.

In the past couple of years, many of our community members have become more vocal than they have been in the past. That is healthy, and that has led to our doing some things differently and some things better. We hired Scott Derickson in part because of his skills as a communicator, and he has delivered everything we asked for in that capacity. That might not have been the first hiring criterion for some of our other managers – Jim Hendryx, Dan Brown and Jim Row certainly come to mind – but they have also performed capably in that area this year. Many times, people's concerns can be addressed with a simple explanation. Other times, they can be encouraged to join a process and contribute to its success, rather than sitting on the sidelines and being unhappy with it. The sign, WDO and wastewater focus groups have provided invaluable perspectives to our city staff. The neighborhood input in connection with the Greenway project improved it. The same is true for the newly adopted Downtown plan. We expect the same to be true as the 5th Street issue progresses. If the city and its citizens talk to each other, rather than past each other, we can continue to accomplish some amazing things.

We have, in fact, accomplished some amazing things in the last year. Some projects that have made slow progress are complete or nearing completion, and some others that were dreams for years are finally beginning to be realized. With the completion of the gazebo, the Downtown Plaza is complete. So is the Front Street project! So is the Settlemier/Boones Ferry/214 intersection, westbound right turn lane and all. A chunk of the Greenway trail is near completion, and over a mile of it will be done this year. Sidewalks will finally line both sides of Highway 214 between the high school and Park Avenue, and a pedestrian-activated light will provide a measure of safety to people crossing the road. Centennial Park 's fourth ball field will be completed. We will make some decisions about how best to protect the safety and quality of our water supply, and we will implement them. In short, we can be proud of what we have done in the last year, and we have a lot to accomplish in the coming year.

In the last year or so, we have gone through a cycle that has made some major changes in our management team. Tragedy, retirement, and normal life transitions all played their part in this, but we now have a management team that I am confident will lead us to a successful future. We have "old-timers" like Scott Russell and Jim Row, relative newcomers like Scott Derickson, Terrie Stevens, Dan Brown, and Jim Hendryx, and really brand new hires Christina Shearer, Ignacio Palacios, and Doug Garrett. Each in their way is a top drawer professional. The city is in good hands with these people in charge.

As we look to the future, we have two major pieces of unfinished business: the urban growth boundary expansion and the Woodburn Interchange. The urban

growth boundary expansion and its delay would be the subject of an entire speech. Suffice it to say that oral arguments in the Oregon Court of Appeals took place last spring, and we are still waiting for a decision. When that decision is made, we will do anything necessary to complete the expansion process. We will also take every opportunity possible to fight for changes in the process itself. Expansion supported by a community and three different levels of government should not be delayed indefinitely through abuse of the court system. We will keep the community informed as this progresses.

On a more positive note, the Woodburn Interchange is progressing on the drawing board and through purchases of right of way. The transportation package approved in the last session of the Oregon Legislature includes \$43 million for the interchange. That, previously budgeted funds, and a city contribution go a long way toward the costs of actually building the interchange. However, contracts will not be awarded and ground will not be broken until full funding is in place. We are aggressively lobbying for the balance of the funding from federal sources. Commissioner Sam Brentano and I went to Washington, D.C. in February, and Scott Derickson and I returned in July to promote our cause. We will not give up until ground is broken.

In closing, I am proud of our city staff and proud of our community for what 2009 brought. A year that began with trauma and continued with major economic distress was nevertheless successful, productive and positive. 2010 will be even better.